An Oak Tree from Down Under
by Len C. Stubbs, Warragul, Australia

One of the oldest oak trees in Australia stands upon the premises of the Latrobe Golf Club in the Melbourne suburb of Alphington. The English oak (Quercus robur) attains a height of 40 feet with a spread of 90 feet. Its wide spread has been achieved by the lack of competition from other trees, and its trimmed lower branches indicate it being pruned regularly by either sheep or cattle.

It has been suggested that the oak tree was planted circa 1840 by Kate Wills, the daughter of Mr. Thomas Wills, the original owner of "Lucerne." The property has long since been divided and changed hands. But the oak still stands as an object of beauty and a brief reminder of history for future generations.

How the acorn got all the way to Australia is an intriguing story, supplied to Mr. Stan Gregory by his uncle H.C.A. Harrison. Mr. Harrison's ancestors arrived in 1802 on the ship "Coromandel." They were the first shipload of assisted migrants (there were a scattered number of free settlers earlier in the 1790's) brought out at the repeated requests of Governor Bligh to grow food for the often starving colony during the early years of establishment. Amongst the emigrants, besides William Stubbs and his wife Sarah Wingate and their children, was George Hall, whom Mr. Harrison knew (from the recorded history of these families in the book "The Pioneers of Portland Head") had no connection with the Georges River in New South Wales. The Georges river, a rather minor stream, is headwater of Botany Bay, but eventually bends around to about ten kilometers at its nearest point to the Parramatta River, headwaters of Sydney Harbor. The Parramatta River is where Mr. Hamilton's ancestor first set foot in Australia. This bend in the Georges River is called as a locality, Georges Hall, not after the man, but from some other derivation.

All the Coromandel settlers were given land in 1802-3 on the Hawkesbury River some 25 miles west of Parramatta. In this area there are no oak trees, so it is presumed that no one on that ship brought any acorns with them. However, in later years, acorns were brought, but none were successfully established due to the long time at sea and the short viability of the English Oak acorn.

The first recorded oaks were imported into Australia as trees by John McArthur, founder of the Merino sheep industry, in 1817. He brought at least six Quercus robur and on a stopover in Lisbon acquired two Cork Oaks (Quercus suber). Five of the oaks, as well as the two Cork oaks were planted in the Parramatta Public Domain, and are still growing, making them specimens of 170 years.
Georges Hall is only about 10 km (6 miles) from Parramatta and from there the direct route to Victoria is by ship from Sydney which would pass by these oak trees. So it seems to be very logical that the source of seed brought from Georges Hall in 1840 and planted in Alphington was from the oaks in Paramatta.

Not only is the Alphington oak tree probably the oldest in Victoria, but it is probably a descendant of the oldest oaks in Australia, and intimately connected with the history of Australia as well.

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**Trials and Tribulations of Germinating Acorns**  
by Susan Cooper

For my sins, I have this urge to grow oak. The demands of oak are rather different from many other trees, and fraught with many extra problems. The aim is to obtain fresh acorns, not over-dried, straight from the parent tree -- kindly sent by friends overseas, if necessary. However, this is not as simple as it would seem. Many acorns - particularly in the white oak series - are in an unseemly hurry to germinate, and will do so virtually as soon as they hit the ground.

This is not a good idea, so how to discourage them without overstepping the rather fine line between not drying enough or drying too much? Not drying enough, one has the unenviable task of unraveling a mass of radicles which may or may not be partly rotted, on arrival through the post, or a few weeks after collecting; and then risking them through the winter. Too much drying, and the viability drops like a stone. So, what to do? A good clue when sending is to include a small amount of dry peat to the polyethylene bag. This will mop up extra moisture and so prevent the acorns sweating and then germinating in transit. Another tip is to spread acorns out in the fridge before bagging, to cool the "field heat," and prevent them from cooking themselves in the bag. This should also help to shake out some of the maggots, because you can be certain that you will have those as well! Who can recommend a suitable insecticide + fungicide acorn dressing which does no damage to the acorns?

Acorns I have collected, cooled and dried a very little, I bag into thick poly bags together with just-moist peat, and stow them in the fridge until spring. If they still sweat, I know I must dry them some more. Too-dry or germinating acorns I store in the same way, but in the case of dry ones I will soak in the spring to re-vitalize them if possible.

In the spring, which in England is at the beginning of March, when, in theory, the worst of the frosts are over, I disentangle the radicles of the foolhardy, even reducing the length of the most impatient by an inch or two. I then pot these up to the tall narrow version of 2 liter black poly pots in a good commercial compost. This is about pH 5.5 and includes loam, grit, and bark, as well as 9-month fertilizer. My own mix proved insufficient to satisfy large Quercean appetites over a season! Those acorns not in such a hurry are moved in their bags to my warm mouse-free porch and urged to get a move on. Unfortunately, this summer, the urging proved rather too much with the sudden onset of a heatwave in May, and some got cooked!